

Easter 5  
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*To Not Hinder God*

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"Who was I that I could hinder God?" he says. "Who was I that I could hinder God?" says Peter. Beloved Peter, more the pragmatist than the deep thinker or theologian, I nevertheless find him inspiring. Strong in so many ways, he is not always a good leader, but he is always true to himself, his struggles and (in his way) his faith.

In this morning's passage from *Acts* we hear how much Peter is on overload. Just when he thinks he has his faith & his role in this new church figured out, *Wham!* God gives him a vision and he's dumbfounded and ready to give up.

The Rev. Ken Kesselus proposes a wonderful image in his sermon on this passage: Think about filling up a cup with water. You can fill it only so far, right? Once it has been filled to the brim, what happens when you try to add more water to it? It overflows, of course. The same is true of a sponge submerged in water. It becomes so saturated and can no longer absorb any more, and begins to shed the excess.

At this point, in those early days of the church, this was how Peter felt. God had already given him and tremendous amount of trust and responsibility, and now, God also gives him one of those visions that we tend to associate more with John and the book of revelation. And, it is because of *this vision*, that Peter passes his point of excess.

Peter's faith was already strong: He had felt, personally and directly, the presence of God in Jesus. It had filled him up, as well as his faith community, but now, it was going beyond that. At first Peter wanted to push it aside, or put a lid on it, but he couldn't, and he was forced to reconsider.

At this point in history, the fledgling church is young, and it's already split in two (or more) pieces, regarding who should and shouldn't be included. Understandably, the Jews thought of Jesus as a Jew, and still considered themselves Jewish. Even if some of the synagogues didn't want them around, they thought of themselves as different kinds of Jews. And so, when the word came to them that non-Jews were accepting Jesus' teaching, Peter and the others leaders didn't know what to do. *Those* people were too different, and in all the

wrong ways! As Jews they considered themselves the chosen people, and not just that – but now as Jesus’ followers, they were *the chosen* of the *chosen people*!!!

Ah, but then the vision came: Peter may well have *wanted* to put a lid on what God had given him, but God would not have it so, and Peter realized that this way of Jesus’ was *about much more* than he ever thought, and now it was *for many more* than he had ever believed. It seemed that it was not just for Jews but Jews and non-Jews, alike!

“Who was I that I could hinder God?” he says. What a great line! “Who was I that I could hinder God?” Who are any of us, that we would hinder God!

It feels good to feel God’s comforting presence in our church. It feels good to experience God’s passion for justice when we help others in the larger community. It feels good when we hear God’s wisdom in scripture, and the beauty of God’s creation when we walk outdoors. And yet, in as many ways as we can experience it, each and all of us is limited. Like a glass of water, or a sponge, we can only take in so much, and that is our experience of God, beyond that, it is too much, right, just like Peter. And, without a doubt there is still more of God to be experienced. Even if we can’t take in more, we can still believe that there may well be more, and *that* is for others to experience God in another way. “Who am I to hinder God?”

It is good for us to think about how God fills us and our lives, and it is also good for us to consider how we hinder God. We can be a conduit or we can be a stopper; a sponge or a repellent. It’s not over just because we’re full. God is so much more than we can absorb or imagine!

In today’s Gospel, we hear Jesus saying to his followers, “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” When I hear these words, I feel filled with God’s love, and yet that’s not where it stops. Would that any of us could do as much, and more! And yet it is our call to try! Who are we, to hinder God?

*Amen.*